

We claim:

1. A method for determining a value of a function of a variable, the method comprising: receiving a value of the variable; and determining the value of the function of the variable based on the received value of the variable.

1. A computerized consumer shopping tool, comprising:  
an Internet web services system,  
a plurality of store specific ESL computer systems each linked to the  
5 Internet web services system for communication therewith, wherein each ESL system  
includes a database of electronic display tag display information records, a multiplicity of  
such records including a flag which when set acts as an annunciator trigger for controlling  
operation of an annunciator in a corresponding display tag, wherein each ESL system is  
operable to communicate information to the Internet web services system regarding  
10 products, such communicated information including the state of the flag associated with  
the products display tag information record;  
wherein the Internet web services system monitors the flag of such records  
for identifying products for which there is a related sale, special or other promotion.

2. A computerized consumer shopping tool, comprising:  
an Internet web services system,  
at least one ESL system linked to the Internet web services system for  
communication therewith, the ESL system including a plurality of electronic display tags  
associated with products, a multiplicity of the tags including annunciators such as lights,  
20 the ESL system operable to control the annunciators to identify tags which utilize a tiered  
pricing schedule, the display tags controllable to display a plurality of the price tiers.

3. A computerized consumer shopping tool, comprising:  
an Internet web services system,  
25 at least one ESL system associated with at least one store and linked to the  
Internet web services system for communication therewith, the ESL system including a  
plurality of electronic display tags associated with products, a multiplicity of the tags  
including annunciators such as lights, the ESL system operable to control the annunciators

to identify tags which utilize a tiered pricing schedule, the display tags controllable to display a plurality of the price tiers;

the Internet web services system operable to provide a given consumer with information regarding products of the at least one store which are on the tiered pricing schedule, based upon information communicated from the ESL system to the Internet web services system.

4. The computerized shopping tool of claim 3 wherein the Internet web services system is operable to identify the pricing tier applicable to the given consumer and to provide the given consumer with pricing information for that pricing tier.

5. A computerized consumer shopping tool, comprising  
an Internet web services system,  
at least one ESL computer system linked to the Internet web services system for communication therewith,  
the Internet web services system including at least one database of product information received from the ESL computer system;  
wherein at least one of the ESL computer system and the Internet web services system is operable to trigger communication with the other system on a regular basis;

wherein the Internet web services system includes a software interlock for preventing the retrieval or display of at least certain information within at least one database if a time period since a last communication operation between the ESL computer system and the Internet web services system exceeds a set threshold.

6. A method of providing consumer access to store product and pricing data, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a web site system from which a consumer can access product and pricing information for a plurality of stores;

providing a communications link for communicating store product and pricing information from stores to the web site system;

monitoring a time since a last product and pricing information update from a given store; and

5 preventing the consumer from accessing the product and pricing information for the given store if the time exceeds a set threshold.

7. The method of claim 6 wherein the communications link is an automated link at least between an in-store computer system of the given store and the web site  
10 system, at least one of the in-store computer system and the web site system operable to initiate communication between the two systems.

8. The method of claim 6 wherein the communications link is a store user-controlled Internet link.

9. A computerized consumer shopping tool comprising:  
an Internet Web Site including a web server operable to enable a given user  
to enter and store a list of desired products and information identifying desired stores, the  
web server operable to look up stored pricing information for the desired stores and list of  
20 desired products, the web server operable to provide the given user total cost information  
for the list of desired products for each desired store for comparison purposes.

10. The computerized shopping tool of claim 9 wherein product pricing data for the desired stores is made available to the web server from each given store from one of a  
25 linked electronic shelf edge display system of the given store or a standard store price file stored on the web server.

11. The computerized shopping tool of claim 9 wherein the information identifying desired stores is entered by one of (i) selecting stores from a displayed list or (ii) entering location information.

5 12. A computerized method for facilitating consumer price comparison, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a web site where a given user can enter a list of desired products and enter information for desired stores;

for each desired store:

10 checking a product pricing database for a price associated with each desired product;

generating a store total price amount for all items in the list of desired products;

15 providing the given user access to the store total price amount for each desired store for comparing total cost of shopping at the desired stores.

13. The method of claim 12 wherein the given user is not permitted to access product pricing information for each desired product on an individual basis.

20 14. A computerized shopping tool comprising:

an Internet web site including a web server operable to enable a user to enter and maintain a list of desired products and at least one desired store, the web server operable to lookup special pricing information for a group of specified retail stores and to display for the user a list indicating which of the desired products have special pricing;

25 wherein special pricing data is made available to the web server from one of a linked electronic shelf edge display system, a standard store special price file or a public domain source.

15. The computerized shopping tool of claim 14 wherein the special pricing information comprises one of mark-down, tier or clearance item information.

16. A computerized shopping tool comprising:

5 an Internet web site including a web server operable to enable a user to enter and maintain a list of desired products and at least one desired store, the web server operable to (i) identify the area of the desired store where each product is located and (ii) provide to the user a list of products sorted for a best path through the store.

10 17. The computerized shopping tool of claim 16 wherein product location data is made available to the web server software from one of a linked electronic shelf edge display system of the desired store or a standard store plan-o-gram file stored on the web server.

15 18. The computerized shopping tool of claim 16 wherein the web server permits the list to be printed by the user at at least one of the a remote user terminal or at an information kiosk at the desired store.